Finally, A Little Good News

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, Sept. 23—With the appointment of Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State, there is now virtually a whole new Cabinet and top White House staff moving into place here, and what is probably more important, the people around the President are settling down to their work.

The transition looks like one of the most successful in American history. It is due to both the personalities of the great departments of government and not any new party rules and routines in the White House. But something interesting, and maybe even important, is happening here in the aftermath of Watergate.

It is all on the surface so far. The essential policies of the Administration are the same. The defensive and even deceptive arguments are the same. In short, the Administration is looking into the future, and dealing its movements as it goes. But it is moving.

The light and secretive little power center in the White House is gradually dispersing into the departments and agencies. Gen. Alexander Haig Jr. is H. R. Haldeman's replacement; Mel Laird, John Ehrlichman's successor as the President's Assistant for Domestic Affairs; and Kissinger, the President's principal adviser on security affairs, are now coming out from behind the White House screen.

After the President's first televised press conference in over a year, General Haig was available to talk to the press about the background of the President's problems. Mr. Kissinger followed with a press conference promising to open things up and be available to questioning by the Congress, the press and the critical ideas and suggestions of the public.

In these melancholy days of contention and consternation, even if the fundamental questions of the past have not been resolved, these tentative symbols of change, and maybe even of reconciliation, are, at least, more important than the President's arguments that he was right all along, and if he wasn't, it was somebody else's fault, and anyway, was no worse than what other Presidents did in the past.

Everybody in Washington now, including the President, says we must "learn the lessons of Watergate," and some people have. Most of the new key Cabinet members are [illegible] independence, and this is an important lesson.

Vice President Agnew is in deep trouble. He is fighting for his political life, and he is fighting on his own. He